

Suburbs collaborate to rehab abandoned and foreclosed housing

BY ART GOLAB Staff Reporter/agolab@suntimes.com December 13, 2012 8:36PM



Interior view of the apartment building at 1015 So. 4th Ave., Maywood, a 26-unit apartment building, rehabbed by the West Cook County Housing Collaborative. | Photo Provided by IFF

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Suburbs typically fight it out with each other in the battle for federal and state dollars, but now some towns have banded together to get money to rehab abandoned and foreclosed housing, according to a report issued Thursday by a coalition of area planning agencies.

Two such "housing collaboratives," in western and southern Cook County, started with \$660,000 in seed money and have so far pulled down \$35 million to redevelop more than 200 foreclosed properties and demolish 40 blighted properties, the report says.

Maywood, Bellwood, Forest Park, Berwyn and Oak Park make up one of the groups, the West Cook County Housing Collaborative. Yet, so far most of the investment from the initiative has gone to Maywood and Bellwood.

But the towns believe they all will benefit from a healthier real estate climate in their region.

"When the mayors of our five communities came together four years ago to talk about how we could best address affordable housing issues, we determined that the best chance we had to improve our local economies was to work together," Oak Park Village President David Pope said in a statement. "And now we are seeing the successful results of that collaboration. We did not do it alone; we did it together."

In Maywood, the collaborative spent \$3.25 million to rehab a foreclosed and abandoned 26-unit apartment building. Also, three foreclosed single family homes in Bellwood have been rehabbed and sold, and last week seven more homes went on the market in Bellwood, Maywood and Forest Park — with 21 more in the pipeline.

The homes will be sold at market value, most for less than what they cost to rehab. And qualified lower-income buyers are eligible for \$10,000 grants toward the cost of the homes, making them an

even better deal.

When the collaborative bought the homes out of foreclosure, they were in terrible shape, many vandalized and stripped of their copper plumbing.

“These were not the kind of properties that an individual homebuyer could purchase because there was so much construction work to be done, said Kate Ansorge, senior project manager of IFF Housing, a nonprofit hired by the collaborative to run its projects.

Ansorge said she hopes that as funds come in from the properties that are sold, some of the money will go toward projects in Berwyn and Oak Park, the towns that have not yet directly benefitted from the collaborative.

Similar work is going on in south Cook County, where 27 towns have formed the Chicago Southland Housing and Community Development Collaborative. And another collaborative in northwest Cook is focusing on foreclosed condos. The report on the collaboratives was issued by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus and the Metropolitan Planning Council.